

swimming



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BOROUGH OF CHRISTCHURCH

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PLACE MILL

10P



GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Place Mill is contemporary with Christchurch Priory and was built in approximately 1100AD. The Mill ground flour mill until 1539 when the Canons of Christchurch had it converted into a fulling mill for the preparation of woollen cloth. At a later date, it was converted back into a flour mill.

It is important to realise the great importance of the Mill in its day. Christchurch Quay was once a very important commercial area with goods such as grain, wine, timber, coal, etc being imported via Christchurch and up the Avon and Stour to towns inland. To find an imaginative portrait of Christchurch at that era of its history then read Edward Rutherford's "Sarum" published in 1987 by Century. It is a work of fiction based on fact, and in the chapter on the Black Death entering Wessex in 1348 the author describes the first black rat carrying the disease arriving on a boat from France. He gruesomely describes this rat's death in Place Mill and how its infected fleas find a new host in the indigenous English brown rat that infested the Mill in those days.

The miller was an important local figure because everyone needed his services or bought his flour - consequently, he was able to wield considerable power in a small economy like Christchurch.

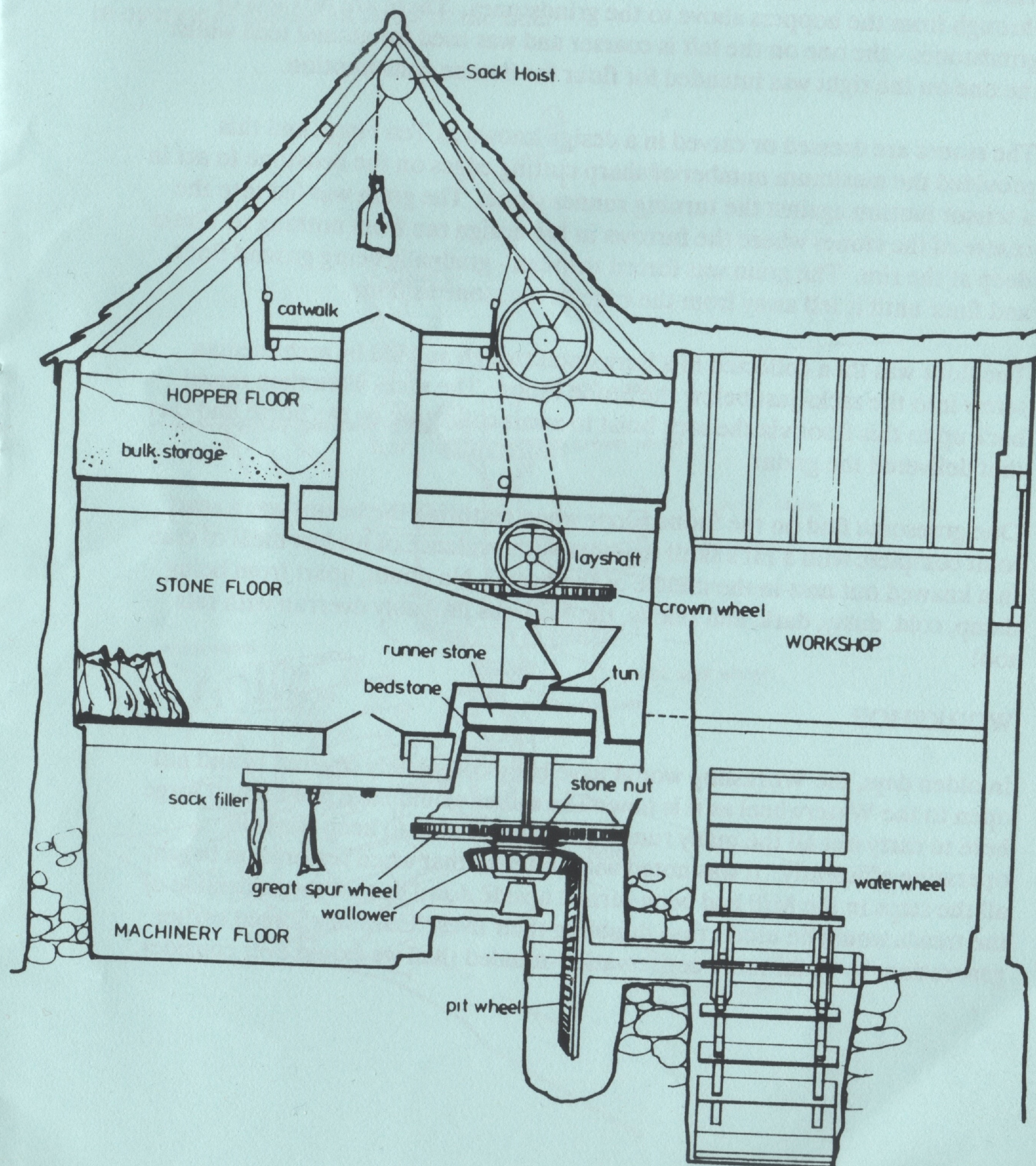
On the outside of the building by the entrance, you can see evidence of where, over the centuries, horse and carts have caused the brickwork to be worn away whilst delivering sacks of grain onto the Stone Floor - the first floor of the building. These bricks are in fact part of the Tudor brickwork; below this level can be seen the large Saxon stones of the original Mill and above, in the gable of the building, the Victorian brickwork is evident.

The Mill has had many owners over its long history, and was eventually bought by Christchurch Council in 1880 for £1100 together with the Quay, Quay Cottage, part of the Priory Gardens and some other pieces of land. It remained as a flour mill until 1908, when the building became dangerous due to excessive vibration, and it was closed and rented to the Keynes family as a boatstore until 1980. In that year the Council decided that it had a duty to restore this historic building and the restoration work is gradually continuing.

HOPPER FLOOR

Up in the narrow dusty eaves of the Mill, by walking along the catwalk you look down on either side to where the hoppers stored the grain. Once unloaded onto the Stone Floor the miller would only have needed to drag the sacks to the Sack Hoist, attached the grain onto the Hoist and they would have sailed upwards through the Trapdoor in the Catwalk, automatically been unhooked and collected in a pile on this floor for the miller to empty them into the hoppers.

Whilst at the top of the building, it is worth noting that during the early part of the restoration many of the roof tile pegs had to be replaced. These were originally carved out of wood and it was felt important to do the restoration in the same way. So 1,856 wooden pegs were hand carved from a branch of a holm oak that had fallen from a tree near the Mill, in exactly the same way that the miller would have done.



STONE FLOOR

The first thing to note on the Stone Floor are the small holes in the ceiling which had wooden or canvas trunking attached to allow the grain to feed through from the hoppers above to the grindstones. There are two sets of grindstones - the one on the left is coarser and was used for animal feed whilst the one on the right was intended for flour for human consumption.

The stones are dressed or carved in a design known as Ten Harp, and this provided the maximum number of sharp cutting edges on the bedstone to act in a scissor motion against the turning runner stone. The grain was fed into the centre of the stones where the furrows in the design ran from nothing to 12mm deep at the rim. The grain was forced through - gradually being ground finer and finer until it fell away from the edge of the stone as flour.

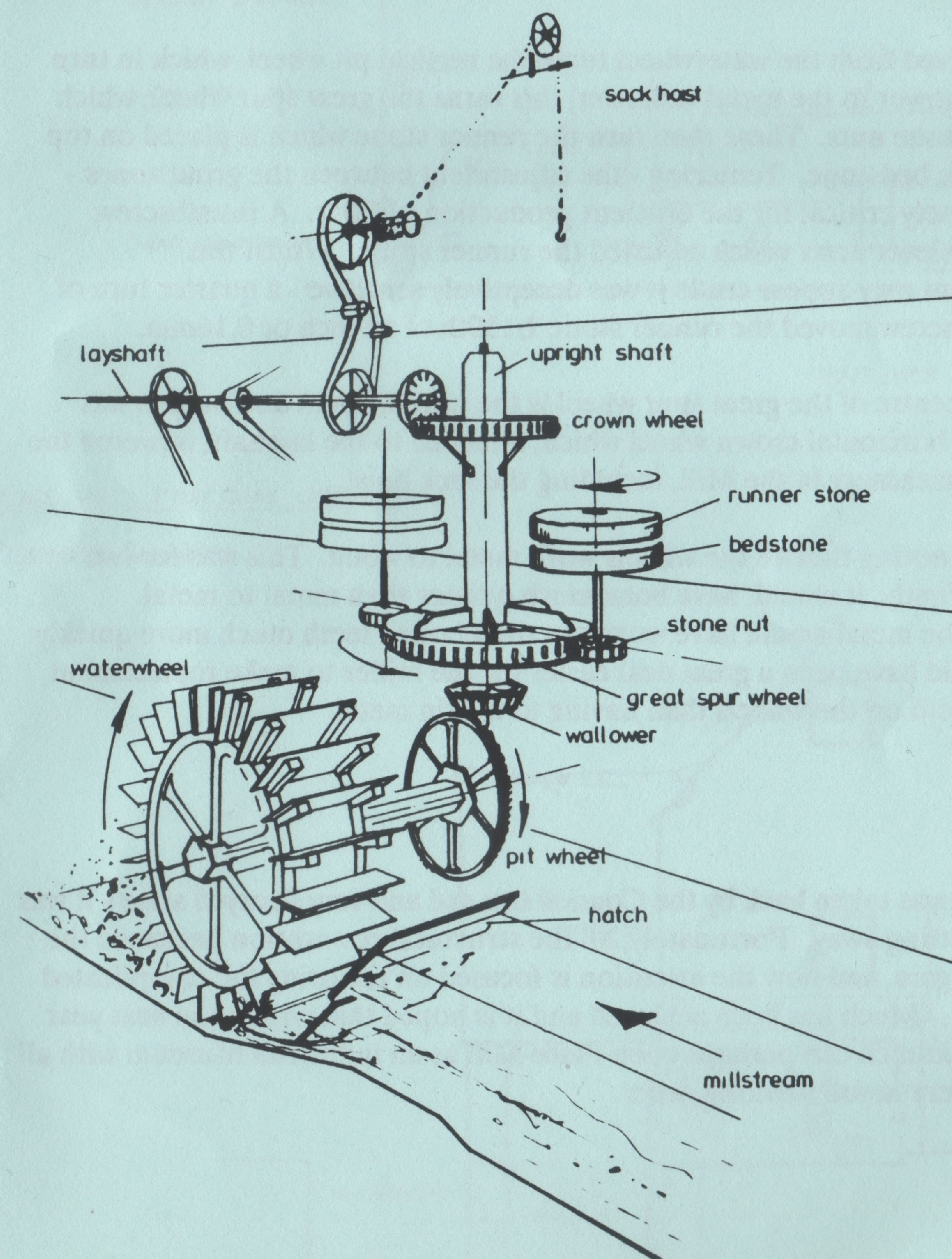
The flour was then collected in a horizontal trough and fed by archimedian screw into the sacks just below the Stone Floor. The sacks were then raised back up to this floor via the sack hoist to await collection by the horse and cart that delivered the grain!

One gruesome find on the Stone Floor when restoring the beams was a scarf joint complete with a rat's skull together with evidence of it's last meal of crab in a knawed out nest in the middle of the beam! No doubt, apart from being damp, cold, dusty, dark, and smelly, the Mill was probably overrun with rats too!

WORKSHOP

In olden days, the Workshop would have been completely covered in and not open to the Waterwheel as it is now. The miller would have had a small forge here to carry out all the many running repairs needed to keep the Mill operating efficiently. It was noted with interest that when restoration began, all the steps in the Mill had been turned upside down so that the underside of the treads would be used - thus doubling their lives. Economy forced earlier generations to be far more conservation-minded than we would ever consider.

The mill stream, which provides the head of water necessary to turn the waterwheel, is almost exactly one kilometre long and has an average fall of less than 1 in 5,000. Place Mill is probably unique because it takes it's supply from one river - the Brewhouse Hole on the River Avon and discharges into another - the River Stour. Both ends of the stream are tidally affected and occasionally high spring tides coupled with heavy river discharges cause flooding in the mill. On the bed of the millrace some beautifully dressed stonework was found, laid to a high degree of accuracy, and the double board weir arrangement, which projects a jet of water into the bottom of the waterwheel blades allows the mill to operate at almost all states of the tide.



When restoration was started on the Mill it was difficult to know what size and shape the paddles should be to produce the optimum power. An old rotting paddle was found which, despite being in a poor condition, gave enough clues of how a new paddle would have looked when first carved by the miller. This original paddle can be seen in the display case on the Stone Floor.

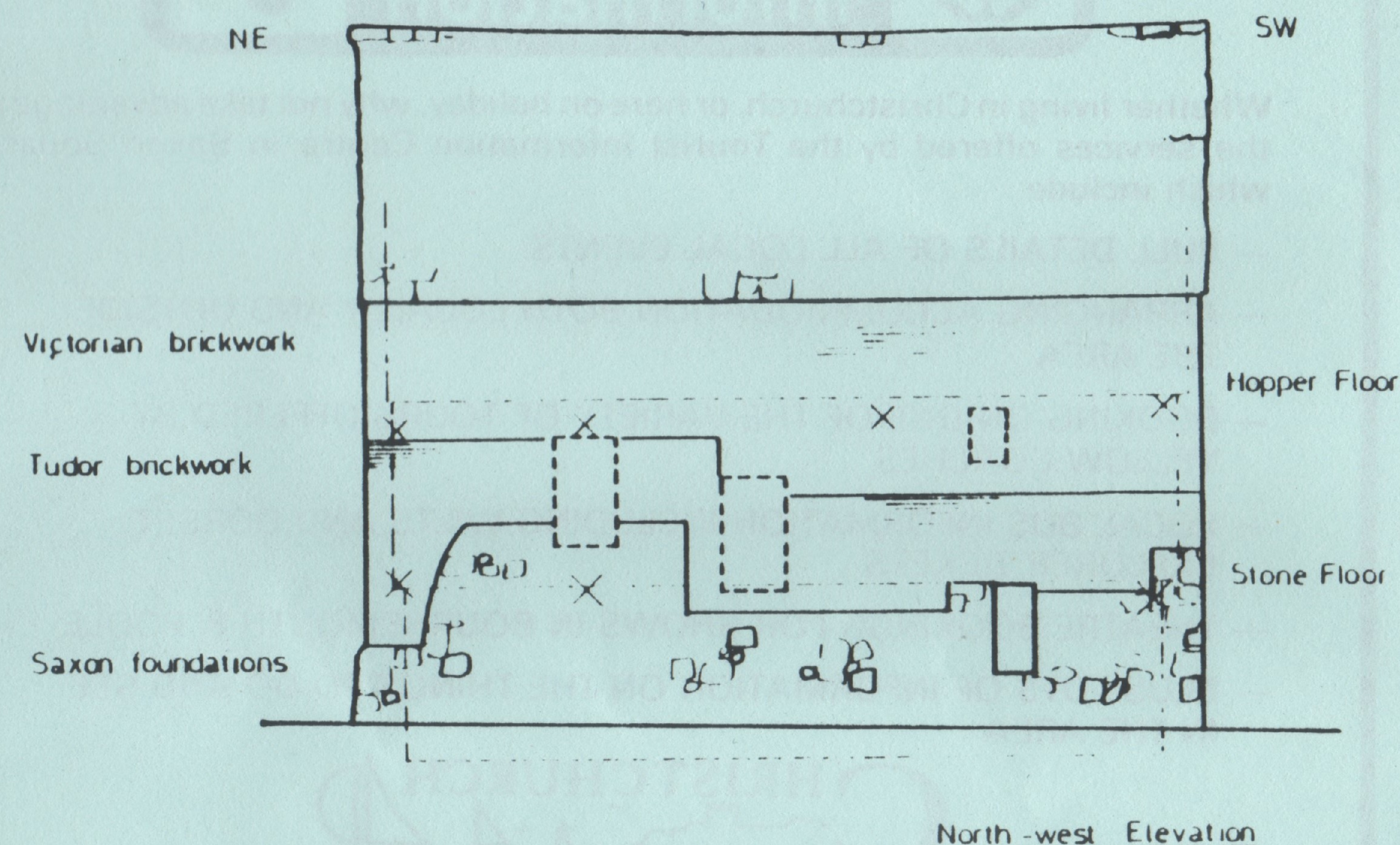
MACHINERY FLOOR

Power derived from the waterwheel turns the vertical pit wheel, which in turn transmits power to the metal wallower, this turns the great spur wheel, which turns the stone nuts. These then turn the runner stone which is placed on top of the static bedstone. Tentering - the adjustment between the grindstones - was absolutely critical for the efficient production of flour. A thumbscrew moved two lever arms which adjusted the runner stone. Whilst this arrangement may appear crude it was deceptively sensitive - a quarter turn of the thumbscrew moved the runner stone 1/150th of an inch or 0.16mm.

From the centre of the great spur wheel is the upright shaft and on this was placed the horizontal crown wheel which, attached to the layshaft, powered the ancillary machinery in the Mill, including the sack hoist.

It is worth noting that all the wheels work metal to wood. This was for two reasons. Firstly, it would have been much quieter than metal to metal. Secondly the metal would have worn out the wooden teeth much more quickly and it would have been a great deal easier for the miller to make replacement wooden teeth on the wheels than having to cast in metal.

Place Mill was taken back by the Council in a sad and very decayed state - it was literally rotting away. Fortunately, all the structural restoration has made the Mill safe again, and now the attention is focused on restoring the complicated machinery. Much has been achieved and it is hoped that within the next year or so the Council can perhaps open Place Mill as an industrial Museum with all its machinery in full working order.



PLACE MILL, TOWN QUAY, CHRISTCHURCH

Prominent Elevations

